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Restructuring and revitalization of the United Nations in the economic, social and related fields

Report of the Secretary-General

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I. Introduction

1. At its resumed organizational session in May 2001, the Economic and Social Council in its decision 2001/212 of 4 May 2001 decided to examine the issue of the restructuring and revitalization of the United Nations in the economic, social and related fields at its substantive session of 2001 and requested the Secretary-General to submit a report to the Council at that session. The present report reviews the status of the implementation of General Assembly resolutions 50/227 and 52/12 B and Council resolutions 1998/46 and 1999/51. In addition, the mandate contained in the annex to Assembly resolution 45/264 of 13 May 1991, requesting an annual progress report on restructuring and revitalization of the United Nations in economic, social and related fields is covered in the present report.

2. The Economic and Social Council has received a report on the restructuring and revitalization of the Organization since 1997.[1] The present report is the fifth of its kind. As described in the previous four reports on restructuring and revitalization of the United Nations in the economic, social and related fields,[2] many provisions contained in General Assembly resolutions 50/227 and 52/12 B have been either implemented or developed in more detail in the subsequent Council resolutions 1998/46 and 1999/51, which provide specific guidance to the Council's subsidiary bodies. Information regarding the implementation of certain aspects of the above resolutions is also contained in other reports regularly submitted to the Council, such as the report on triennial policy review of the operational activities for development, the reports of the Executive Boards of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Food Programme (WFP), the annual overview report of the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC), the consolidated report of the outcome of the functional commissions, and the reports on the follow-up to United Nations conferences, which should be read in conjunction with the present report.

3. The present report identifies the practices that have been put in place to continue the implementation and monitoring of the relevant provisions. For those provisions that still require further implementation and are not covered by any other report, suggestions are made on how to continue addressing those issues. The present report aims to assist the Council in exploring ways to streamline its efforts in the restructuring and revitalization of the United Nations in the economic, social and related fields.

II. Streamlining the review of the implementation of General Assembly resolutions 50/227, 52/12 B and related resolutions of the Economic and Social Council

4. The following table provides a summary of how the implementation has been monitored and discussed by the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly. The left column indicates relevant provisions of General Assembly resolution 50/227 and Council resolutions 1998/46 and 1999/51. The right column describes how the implementation has been monitored and includes suggestions for streamlining the review of the implementation.

5. In light of the experience gained since the adoption of General Assembly resolution 50/227, some recommendations and suggestions could be formulated concerning measures to enhance the overall functioning of the Economic and Social Council. Some of these recommendations are included under relevant provisions below, where it is deemed appropriate.

Relevant provisions	*Implementation/suggestions*
General Assembly resolution 50/227	
Funding of operational activities for development of the United Nations system (annex I, sect. I)	The issue is discussed by the Council in its operational activities segment and by the General Assembly during its consideration of operational activities for development, in particular, in the context of the triennial policy review.
General Assembly (annex I, sect. II)	
The use of innovative mechanisms, such as panel discussions with delegations and interactive debates with the active participation of Secretariat and agency representatives as well as outside experts should be encouraged (para. 19)	The organization of panels and executive briefings has become an established practice. Innovative mechanisms have been introduced, such as presentations and discussions with outside resource persons, including academics, civil society representatives and journalists.
There is a need to promote greater coherence and complementarity between the work of the Second and Third Committees (para. 21)	Bureaux of the Second and Third Committees have continued the efforts to improve coherence and complementarity between the two committees.
There is a need to consider possible measures to allow for the coordinated consideration of the report of the Economic and Social Council during the sessions of the General Assembly (para. 22)	The report of the Council continues to be considered in four of the main committees and in plenary meetings.
Resolutions should be shorter, in particular their preambular section. The bureaux, in reviewing the respective agendas, could identify and recommend those individual items or clusters of items that could be effectively considered in omnibus resolutions (para. 24)	From 1994 to 1998, the number of resolutions in both committees steadily decreased, however, there was a slight increase in 1999 and 2000 compared to 1998. No significant changes have been observed in the length of resolutions. Both Committees need to continue to make efforts to adopt omnibus resolutions.
To facilitate discussions based on an integrated approach to development issues, the possibility of choosing a principal theme or themes should be explored to focus the substantive debate under each cluster in the agenda (para. 27)	The Second and Third Committees have tried to focus their debates under clusters and sub-clusters of the agenda.

Relevant provisions	*Implementation/suggestions*
Economic and Social Council	
The Council shall hold a shorter, focused substantive session for four weeks in July (para. 40)	The substantive session, although curtailed to four weeks, is still considered by many as too long and structured in a way that is not conducive to the effective functioning of all segments with the right kind and level of participation. These issues could be addressed through improved organization and management of the Council's work, inter alia, by shortening its July session to about three weeks and holding separately, in alternate years, a high-level two-day meeting on operational activities and a high-level two-day meeting on humanitarian issues.
The Council may convene special sessions to address urgent developments in the economic, social and related fields that may require guidance and coordination by the Council (para. 41)	Today, the Council remains active throughout the year with greater intensity of activity and ambitious goals than in the past, including the special high-level meetings with the Bretton Woods institutions; thematic meetings with the agencies; meetings on the outcome of the Administrative Committee on Coordination; and the various organizational and resumed sessions. The Council should build on recent progress and introduce greater flexibility in scheduling its sessions for greater efficiency. The segments and meetings could be scheduled during the year so as to maximize the Council's capacity to prepare for its work and deliver timely responses and outputs. In particular, the Council should, as much as possible, continue to meet in response to global developments in the economic and social area and address urgent issues requiring its consideration ("being on call") like the Security Council. A phased schedule could also help ensure that participation in all instances is at the appropriate level and includes decision-makers from national Governments.
The outcome of each segment of the Council should be strengthened and made more action-oriented. Resolutions, decisions and agreed conclusions should be implemented and followed up by all relevant parts of the United Nations system. This process should be monitored by the Council and the General Assembly on a regular basis, as appropriate (para. 44)	The Council may wish to review whether agreed conclusions currently adopted at the end of the coordination and humanitarian affairs segments, are, in their present form in any sense better than draft resolutions. It may be more effective to modify them, for example, into two parts: (a) analytical summary of the discussion to be prepared by the bureau, on the basis of consultations with Council members; and (b) a short set of agreed conclusions to be agreed upon through informal consultations. Alternatively, the Council could adopt shorter, more action-oriented resolutions.
The bureau shall monitor the state of preparedness of documentation for the Council	The bureau may wish to request an in-depth examination of more logistical aspects of work

Relevant provisions	*Implementation/suggestions*
and take necessary measures to facilitate its timely issuance in all official languages (para. 50)	pertaining to the delay in documentation, synchronization of informal consultations and scheduling of the Council sessions to attract the desired attention and attendance.
The Council should develop a focused dialogue on the chosen theme or themes with the funds and programmes, the regional commissions and the relevant specialized agencies, including the Bretton Woods institutions, as well as the World Trade Organization (para. 57)	The Council may wish to consider linking the coordination segment back to back with the high-level segment and select one theme for both segments. This should enable the Council to address both the policy and system-wide coordination aspects of the theme. The high-level segment would bring together ministers and policy-makers, heads of the Bretton Woods institutions and other agencies of the United Nations system and the coordination segment would serve to engage the Executive Heads of the agencies in a dialogue with the Council.
The role of the Council in providing overall coordination and guidance for operational development programmes and funds on a system-wide basis should be reinforced, including objectives, priorities and strategies in the implementation of the policies formulated by the General Assembly, as well as concentrating on cross-cutting and coordination issues related to operational activities, including through a high-level meeting, in order to provide an opportunity for policy makers to engage in discussion on the broader issues for development cooperation (para. 60) Contributions to the preparations for the triennial policy review of operational activities conducted by the General Assembly should be continued (para. 65)	The operational activities segment could be held in two parts. The first high-level part could provide an opportunity to create a real "development cooperation forum", which would be held once every two years, and meet at a convenient time for two days. This forum could bring together high-level policy-makers, giving them an opportunity to meet both in formal and informal settings under the auspices of the Council to deal with well-chosen and carefully prepared topics. The forum should cover all forms of development assistance ranging from bilateral to multilateral cooperation and should include participation from non-governmental organizations and the private sector. The forum would not have the features of a development council; its outcome would be greater dialogue among key stakeholders and possibly an agreed statement on future action. The second regular part of the segment could be held annually for two days and focus on the follow-up to the comprehensive triennial policy review and on management issues, and be better linked to the themes of the other segments.
The primary function of this (general) segment as that of an action-oriented review of the activities, reports and recommendations of the Council's subsidiary bodies should be consolidated, avoiding a repetition of the debates held in those bodies and focusing attention on major policy issues that require a prioritized and coordinated response from the United Nations system as a whole (para. 66). The Council should regularly review the agenda of its general segment (para. 67)	In order to increase the Council's managerial and oversight functions, the Secretary-General, in his previous reports, recommended the further streamlining and regrouping of the agenda items in the general segment. The Council may wish to consider the following recommendations: (a) The general segment should focus on the management functions of the Council, including guidance to its subsidiary bodies (3 days), consideration of specific system-wide issues (one day) and a review of coordination

Relevant provisions	*Implementation/suggestions*
	issues relating to humanitarian activities (one day); (b) The outcomes of the Council's functional commissions should be considered on the basis of a consolidated report identifying cross-cutting policy issues as well as gaps/overlaps and with the aim of discontinuing pro forma reviews of each report, unless otherwise requested by a Member State; (c) Reports of the functional commissions could reflect the overall theme of the Council. During its deliberations under this item, the participation of chairs of functional commissions should be explored; (d) The interagency dimension would centre around specific system-wide coordination issues, and the coordination of humanitarian activities and would draw conclusions from meetings of clusters of agencies held over the year. During the deliberations under this item, participation of relevant heads of United Nations organizations should be encouraged; (e) In order to help streamline the segment and to allow more time for the core functions of the Council, issues such as decolonization, Palestine and human rights, the Council could take note of some aspects of these issues and transmit them to the General Assembly for action; (f) The debate on coordination issues should be restructured so that the report of the Administrative Committee on Coordination, and reports on, HIV/AIDS, Haiti, tobacco and other system-wide issues can take place in a more coherent manner.
Provision should be made for the integration and coordination of humanitarian and emergency assistance activities with medium- and long-term rehabilitation and development efforts and programmes (para. 69)	The humanitarian affairs segment of the Council could be held separately from the July session, perhaps in June, with high-level participation and on a biennial basis so that it can be properly prepared and does not interfere with the work of the Council. The designation of a theme for the segment may perhaps be unnecessary as long as the segment covers those activities aimed at strengthening humanitarian assistance focusing on the recommendations in the report of the Secretary-General. As the nature of the segment makes it rather difficult to have agreed conclusions, perhaps a resolution or resolutions could be adopted, as is the case in the operational activities segment.

Relevant provisions	*Implementation/suggestions*
Governing bodies of the United Nations development programmes and funds (paras. 76-78 of annex I to resolution 50/227)	**Provisions to rationalize the working methods of the Boards (para. 76) and to facilitate effective participation of observers (para. 78) have been implemented. Implementation of guidance from the General Assembly and the Council (para. 77) is addressed on an ongoing basis in the triennial policy reviews and the operational activities segment of the Council.**
Inter-agency coordination (annex I, sect. VII)	**In addition to the active participation by specialized agencies at the substantive session of the Council, Administrative Committee on Coordination's annual overview report is examined during the general segment every year.** **A part of the coordination segment could be devoted to a full consideration of the restructured report of the Administrative Committee on Coordination, including a review of the system-wide follow-up to Council guidance and decisions.**
Economic and Social Council resolutions 1999/51 and 1998/46	
The meetings of the Council's subsidiary bodies should be scheduled at least eight weeks before the session of the Council, where feasible, and submission of the reports of these bodies should be well in advance for the consideration of the Council (para. 2)	**With few exceptions, the eight-week rule has been followed. The Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations, the Executive Boards of UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and WFP face constraints as they meet more than once per year. These constraints provide a reason for the Council to meet more regularly throughout the year.**
Interaction between the Council and its subsidiary bodies should be increased, including through joint bureau meetings and strengthened coordination functions. Efforts should be made to further ensure the regular exchange of information on their programmes of work, including a more systematic transmission of documentation to other subsidiary bodies (para. 3)	**The Council should further reflect on the way it reviews the work of its functional commissions during its general segment. The consolidated report of the outcome of the functional commissions is aimed at assisting the Council to address the inter-linkages among the work of the commissions more effectively.**
Annual meetings of the bureau of the Council with the chairpersons of the functional commissions are encouraged in order to facilitate an exchange of views and information on the direction of their programmes of work (para. 4)	**The bureau of the Council may wish to consider organizing such a meeting at the time of the general segment of the Council.**
The bureaux of the functional commissions should: **(a) Develop interaction to improve collaboration and coordination on issues that are addressed by two or more commissions, using information technology as required**	**Cooperation and collaboration among the functional commissions are discussed in the consolidated report on the outcomes of the functional commissions.**

Relevant provisions	*Implementation/suggestions*
(b) Continue to support the cooperation among the functional commissions, in particular by implementing fully the guidance given by the Council in its resolution 1999/1 and to encourage further strengthening and intensification of collaboration among and between the secretariats of the functional commissions (para. 22)	
Functional commissions are invited to implement, ..., the relevant provisions of resolution 1998/46, in particular as it relates to the adoption of multi-year programmes of work and to the coordinated follow-up to major United Nations conferences and summits (para. 6)	The issue of multi-year programmes of work is addressed in the consolidated report of the outcome of the functional commissions.
The Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, the Statistical Commission and the Commission on Science and Technology for Development are invited to consider adopting multi-year programmes of work (para. 7)	
Functional commissions are encouraged, in formulating the titles of the items in their programmes of work, to provide, where appropriate, an explicit indication of linkages of their planned activities with those of other commissions and/or with major planned United Nations events, and to enhance ... coordination and collaboration at the programme planning and formulating stage (para. 8)	
Functional commissions should improve their working methods, including as they relate to in-depth discussions, panels of experts and the exchange of national experiences, and their inter-sessional meetings (Council resolution 1998/46, annex II, paras. 2-13)	The working methods of the functional commissions are examined in the consolidated report of the outcome of the functional commissions.
Functional commissions should benefit from high-level participation (Council resolution 1998/46, annex II, paras. 2-13)	
The Committee for Development Policy should improve its methods of work in order to better contribute to the work of the Council; the future programme of work of the Committee should be determined at the substantive session of the Council (para. 13)	The Council, in its resolution 2000/34, welcomed the proposals made by the Committee regarding its future programme of work. As requested by the Council in its resolutions 1998/46 and 2000/34, the Committee, at its second and third sessions in 2000 and 2001, examined and made recommendations regarding the themes chosen for the high-level segment of the Council's substantive session of 2000 and 2001.
Functional commissions should continue to give particular attention to the situation of African countries and the least developed countries in their consideration of relevant	Through the examination and discussion of the consolidated report of the outcome of the functional commissions, the Council could monitor and give guidance to the functional

Relevant provisions	*Implementation/suggestions*
issues, especially in view of the upcoming Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries in 2001 and the review of the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s in 2002 (para. 21)	commissions regarding their discussions on the situation of African countries and the least developed countries, as necessary.
Recommends that the General Assembly consider exploring the possibility of inviting the Bretton Woods institutions to participate in a joint task force; encourages intensification of cooperation at the Secretariat and at the country level; and reiterates its call for a renewed effort to further coordinate policy approaches and give new impetus to collaborative and complementary actions by the organizations and agencies of the United Nations system, in particular in the area of poverty eradication (sect. II, resolution 1999/51)	Cooperation between the United Nations and the Bretton Woods institutions has intensified at the policy level through several high-level events such as the preparation for the International Conference on Financing for Development, the high-level meeting of ECOSOC with the Bretton Woods institutions, the visit of the Executive Directors of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to the United Nations for a meeting with the Council Ambassadors, the World Bank/United Nations Exchange programme whereby Council Ambassadors, chairs of the Executive Boards of UNDP, UNFPA and UNICEF meet with the Executive Board of the World Bank. In addition, briefings and panel discussions provided further opportunities for interaction with the senior officials of the World Bank and IMF during the deliberations in intergovernmental bodies. The increased interaction at the intergovernmental level is matched by the strengthened cooperation at the secretariat level. Coordination of activities at the country level is addressed in the Council's examination of operational activities. The Council may wish to consider ways to enhance the effectiveness of the special high-level meeting with the Bretton Woods institutions, including by a clearer and more focused debate and outcome.

III. Recommendations

6. As summarized in the above table, most provisions have been implemented and incorporated into practices in the last few years. Therefore, the Council could streamline its consideration of the restructuring and revitalization of economic, social and related fields by focusing on its management responsibilities vis-à-vis its subsidiary bodies. To this end, the consolidated report on the outcomes of the functional commissions should be examined more closely with a view to giving guidance to the functional commissions.

Notes

[1] General Assembly resolution 50/227 requested the Secretary-General to report on the implementation of the resolution at its fifty-second session through the Economic and Social Council at its substantive session of 1997.

[2] The four reports are: A/25/155-E/1997/68, A/53/137-E/1998/66, A/54/115-E/1999/59 and A/55/180-E/2000/67.

[3] Paragraph numbers refer to Council resolution 1999/51, unless otherwise indicated.